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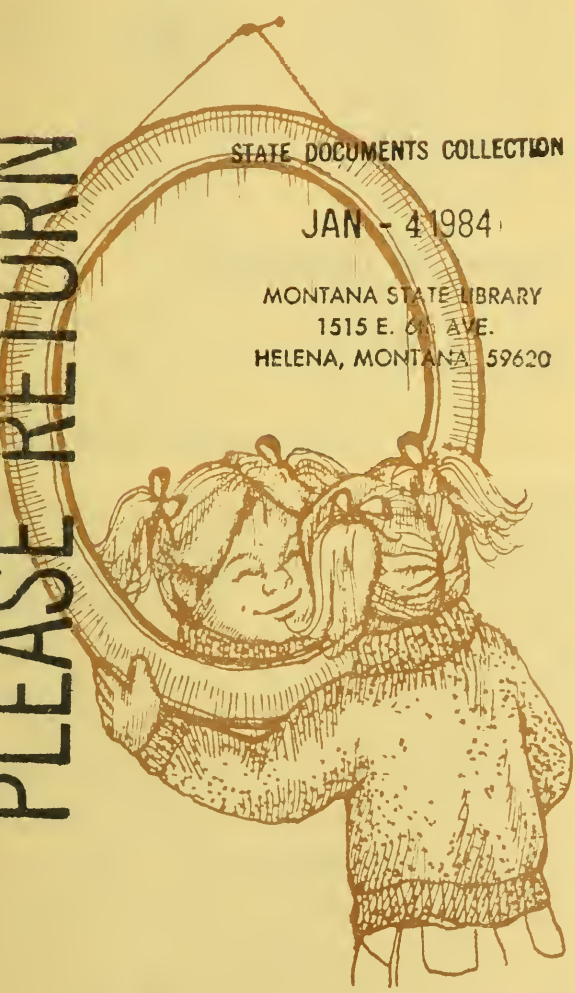

Quality Child Care a Reflection of Your Concern

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Child Care . . . Choose It Carefully

As parents, you no doubt know **where** your children are, but do you know **how** your children are?

The home away from home has become a necessity as mothers join the work force either because they're raising children alone or because they need (or want) to supplement the family income. Today, the average annual cost for day care for one child in Montana is approximately $1875 ($7.50 per day).

If you're a child care customer, here are guidelines to make sure your children are receiving the best possible care — even if you're not there.

Types of Facilities

There are four types of child care available: family day care homes, group day care homes, day care centers, and infant care centers.

Family day care homes offer a home-like atmosphere and flexible schedules for irregular working hours. Homes can care for 3 under age 2, with a maximum of 6 children at any one time. A quality day care home offers child-appropriate activities, limited T.V. and individualized care.

Group day care homes are settings where 2 adults provide care for a maximum of 12 children, with a limit of 6 under age 2. This care is usually provided in a family home and shares many of the same qualities as a family day care home.

Day care centers care for 13 or more children, ages 2 and older. Montana regulation requires a staff/child ratio of 1 adult to every 10 children. Centers may have a variety of recreational facilities, professional staff and hours that coincide with normal working hours.

Infant care centers are equipped to care for children between the ages of 6 weeks and 2 years. The staff/child ratio must be 1 to 4 at all times. Infant care centers are a new child care option.

Family day care homes and group homes are **registered**, and day care centers and infant care centers are **licensed** by the state.

According to recent research, **training** of day care providers has the greatest effect on the quality of child care provided.

Before visiting any facility, telephone several. Ask questions about numbers of children, hours, cost and training taken by the providers. If you're satisfied, arrange a visit.

Avoid Problems

After you've selected a day care for your child, visit the facility with him. Tell him when you'll pick him up each day.

Talk with your privider, tell her about your child's needs and preferences. Ask about your child's day. Let the provider know that you are interested in her experiences with your child.

Don't be afraid to ask!

STAFF MEMBERS

Do they talk easily with the children?
Do they listen and respond to the children?
Do they encourage creativity and imagination?
What's the experience and background of the staff?
Do they respect each child's individuality?
What kind of discipline is practiced?

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Is the place safe? For example, are electric sockets covered?
Is there enough room for each child?
Is the home registered?
Is the equipment, inside and outside, sturdy and easy to use?
Are meals well-balanced and nutritious?
Is there a quiet and comfortable place for naps?
Is there a first-aid kit? How about emergency care?
Is the bathroom clean? Can the child use the facilities himself?
Are heaters ventilated and screened? Are windows locked or securely screened or barred? Are there handrails on the stairs?
Is there a yard?
Are there provisions for an ill child?
Does each child have a space for his own things?

EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Do the children seem happy and relaxed?
Do they show they like and trust the adults?
Does the staff communicate easily with each child?
Is individual achievement encouraged?
Do you feel comfortable with the staff and the place?

LEARNING ATMOSHPERE

Do the activities seem well-planned?
Are there opportunities for each child?
Are the children's questions answered easily?
Are learning opportunities suitable to different ages?
Are special events and tours part of the program?
Are the children's projects displayed and available to take home?

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Do you like how the children behave and relate to each other?
Are conflicts handled sensitively?
Will your child fit in with the other children?
Are the language and culture of each child respected?
What role does the parent play? Are you expected to take part in the program, and in what way?

*Adapted in part from Choosing Child Care A Guide for Parents published by Parents and Child Care Resources 1855 Folsom Street San Francisco 94103. Booklet is $3.)

Parent's Checklist:

- ____ Have I made my expectations clear to the day care provider?
- ____ Do I understand the day care provider's expectations?

Have we discussed:

- ____ how an illness of my child should be handled?
- ____ how discipline should be handled?
- ____ what I am responsible for bringing?
- ____ what my child's day will be like in day care?
- ____ Does the provider know who to reach in an emergency?
- ____ Have provisions been made for care of the child in the event that my day care provider is taken ill or has an emergency?
- ____ Have we agreed on the date due and amounts of payments of fees?
- ____ Have we agreed on advance notice if the child will be absent or late?
- ____ Have we agreed on arrangements for termination of the placement by either one of us?

What is Quality Child Care?

Quality child care supports families.

— It enables parents to work while knowing that their children are safe and nurtured.

— Quality child care exists when parents and providers are aware of children's needs, and how to fulfill them.

— Concerned and knowledgable caregivers provide an environment where children can experience encouragement of acceptable behavior, stimulation from adults and materials, and opportunities to learn and practice new skills.

— Quality child care provides a sound basis for future learning and living.

Demand quality child care, it is your child's right.

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